



## Oral History Project Interview

Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Number of Interview: FF 1.00

Date: 2/24/2021

Gender: Female

Name: Anonymous

Country of Origin: United States/Syria

Year of Immigration: Born in U.S.

**Abstract:** The following interviewee – whose name is omitted from this transcript for confidentiality purposes – is a nursing student in Milwaukee, WI. She compares growing up and going to school in the United States and Syria, emphasizing differences in technology and cultural norms. The interviewee also describes facing discrimination in America, and how her upbringing has influenced her religious practices and social views. Additionally, the interviewee speaks on her career goals and gender roles in her community, as well as coping strategies in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Key Themes:** Cultural differences, education, immigration, faith, COVID-19, technology

**Note:** In the transcript, “I” refers to Interviewer, and “R” refers to Respondent/Interviewee.

I: What is your name, age and level of education?

R: my name is \*anonymous\*, I am 19 years old and I am currently a sophomore in the college of Nursing at Marquette University

I: When you were growing up, where did you go to school: public school, community school, religious school?

R: I didn't go to one specific school; I went to variety in fact. I did go to a Islamic private school for three years in my life. And I have also been to a variety of different public schools like a public school in Illinois. A public school in different parts of Wisconsin and I have also been to a school overseas in Damascus, Syria

I: How was it going to school in Damascus and going to school here?

R: It was definitely different, the way teachers teach, the atmosphere, the intensity of the courses and material and overall expectations and standards are very different. Coming to the United States I've realized that things are very relaxed and the way teachers teach is different and in Syria teachers were more strict and they expected a lot of high standard from the students like the way they sit, the way they eat, just the way we raise our hand, the way we dress it has to be very methodical and very punctual and its very specific and we would have to memorize a lot things and we learned a lot of things that would be taught in younger grades in the US. So that's the key difference that I've seen between the school in Syria and school in the US.

I: So were you born here and did you move back or were you-

R: I was born here, I was born in Portland, Indiana here in the United States. Around the time when I was beginning the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, my family decided to go to Syria for approximately 2 years so I can learn the language, learn Arabic as a 2<sup>nd</sup> language so by the time I was beginning 2<sup>nd</sup> grade we moved to Syria so I can start 2<sup>nd</sup> grade there and attend their schools for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and after I completed the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade we came back to the United States umm for 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above.

I: So, what do you think apart from learning the language, do you think that your other things umm your parents or your family wanted you to learn from there?

R: Yes absolutely, besides the language, family ties, learning who my family is, outside of my parents and siblings was important they wanted me to learn who my grandpa and grandma was, who my uncles and aunts were, my cousins their names, who they are, just having emotional and physical connection with them. Additionally, connecting with the country itself, leaning more about my heritages and Syrians, the culture we have, the food we eat, the landscape, the kind of atmosphere we have in our country, all those things were the goals of going to Syria it was to learn more about the culture and establishing family ties with my family.

I: So, you mention spending time in Syria and America both, you might have childhood memories of both places? so how is childhood different in Syria compared to America?

R: I remember distinctly, my childhood in Syria lacked technology, it lacked a lot of privileges that I acquired when I came back to the States. For example, we had this very old 1980 tv in the living room and it would show limited amount of channels and 'even' with those channels the specific shows that we wanted to watch would be scheduled for certain time frame during the week, so it wasn't like in demand, like you cartoons 24/7, it was a specific timeline like very specific day, week and time where you can watch those cartoons. However, at one point our TV actually broke down so we didn't have tv for 5 months straight so that was like my life as a childhood we used to play cards, board games, we would run around the alleyway, and just umm socialize with the people around umm [pause] yea it was basically a lot of social interaction with peers and my family, a lot of just playing cards and board games, focusing on school just being with family there is a definitely a lack of technology and I've also realized that like that came to my childhood that like for example in the states like thing for instantaneous like if you wanted a chocolate bar you got a chocolate bar if you wanted a certain meal you got that meal everything was instant Syria it wasn't the case if you wanted to get a chocolate bar you'd have to walk like a couple of blocks to the store nearby and buy yourself a chocolate bar but even then like you don't you're not always going to get a chocolate bar every time you're going to go to the store nearby so there was definitely more physical activity or I remember as a child and that like I would be limited to certain things [pause] so the main focus I guess the main thing in my childhood that I remember is there was a lot of physical activity, family interaction, socialization and very very limited technology and limited privileges whereas in the United States was it was kind of the opposite.

I: Were you happy with limited privileges there or did you miss the United States?

R: I don't. so since I was there for second and third grade I don't remember much of like first grade and kindergarten you know it's not like I was thinking about like kindergarten the first grade as a second and third grader during the time you know but I will say that looking back on those days even though even though I do live in the best like living conditions and it wasn't the most horrible ideal childhood and I didn't have all these privileges there is I still look back on them fondly because I did have family around and I did things that were that were beneficial to my health and beneficial to my social life and all that and I love the journey one childhood or as looking back to when I was a 4th grader back in the States I remember like I will go to school and I went through a lot of discrimination for being Arab in for having an accent during the time because I mean as a second ..after going to school for two years straight... You're going to lose your English a bit the English is your first language and so I did have an accent in fourth grade and I would go home and the only thing I would I look forward to was watching TV and that was that was the closest that I had technology during the time but still like that the majority of my time it was done on watching TV because I didn't have the ability to make friends ummm in that environment where I was being discriminated against.

I: Since you were struggling with discrimination in your school years in America, how do you define yourself or identify yourself today?

R: Can you reword the question?

I: Yeah, I mean like how would you identify yourself in terms of religious and cultural values after going through discrimination? Did it change the way you identify yourself or what part did that lead you to?

R: Hmm well, whether I got discriminated against or not it doesn't change the fact that I'm with some number-number one and that I'm Syrian number second like number two so I think like the more like all that discrimination has made me realize that if I'm being discriminated this much there must be some value that I'm carrying as a result that discrimination and that value obviously comes from just my identity and how is different from other people or how my identity has become misconstrued by society and, and that people spill to educate themselves and choose to be ignorant and I'm not going succumb and submit to people's ignorance and give up on my identity especially when that there's nothing wrong with the identity and it has nothing to do with those false supposed stereotypes of terrorism and backwardness and close-mindedness that they frame Arabs and Muslims to be so I guess I would say that my identity today I-I consider myself unapologetically Muslim and along with that that I-I have a prideful of the-the rich cultural heritage should I carry from Syria

I: Its good that you turned your experiences into a positive

I: I would now move towards religion and culture. Knowing more about the traditions what are the things you practice from your religion or culture

R: Sooo I don't I don't practice much when it comes to my culture when it comes to Syrian culture just cuz a lot of things that I practice already it's it's embedded in the culture but it's also inherently in the religion itself and for me religion is more important than anything else than any other identity that I have so I'm just going to speak mostly on the religion, so for traditions I wear hijab ,I practice modesty, I pray 5 times a day, I fast the month of Ramadan aand I do try to even though I'm not obligated to pay Zakah at this time because I don't have that stable income that I'm required to have to pay Zakah I still tried to pay charity here and there as a means to practice and get myself in the realm of charity before I have a stable job the size as part of my face I I try to keep social ties with people check up on people, help others when they need to staying positive in passing adversity seeking education and everything being aware of social issues and speaking up against Injustice has spreading awareness using platforms that I have to learn and to spread awareness to those issues as well-being overall a better person everyday whether its emotionally, mentally, spiritually, socially umm politically etcetera all that I consider it to be part of my faith like it if it weren't for my faith I would not I don't think I would be trying to be a better citizen in a better person everyday my faith in the picture

I: And how much do you participate in community religious services or visit your religious community center?

R: A lot umm I think after school, schools' like the number one thing that takes up the most time of my day so if there was something second to that it would definitely be community service in the mosque ,youth programming in the mosque, anything religious and spirit and spiritual activity related it would definitely it would definitely be second umm I'm involved in Core specifically in the sisters group in planning events that group, participating in the events

,engaging in lectures and just learning more about my religion because there's always there's always something to learn every day there's always a new gem to acquire. I like to take the time to read and just focus on myself spiritually and engaging myself in my community in my mosque and around people who share the same faith with me it's something that I definitely try to establish in my life and make sure that I'm spending a lot of time on.

I: Previously you mentioned that you care about politics, and you want to learn more writing regarding issue those issues. Do you think political events in your parents' homeland has affected you somehow?

R: Yeah it's it has affected us because ever since Trump came into office obviously he established the Muslim ban on which banned from 7 Muslim majority countries from entering the US and one of those countries was Syria and as many people know Syria went through a 10-year Massacre and just outright tyranny r any from the from the dictator and when you have a when you have a President who-establishes this this band on people who who are suffering already in and then this war zone and they and he puts a ban on these people from entering a country that they can seek safety in it hurts us especially like as-as people who have family in Syria who we want to bring our family here for safety and for shelter and-and everything so what does definitely affect us politically and it affects us socially so but for me what's happening in Syria and everything is not my reason for being interested in politics I am interested in politics because it shapes everyone's life , it is the met the determinator of everyone's life not just internationally but also right here at home at US I wanna make sure umm that the people here like people color, women. religious minorities that they're having the same access to equal rights as those with privileges and that's something that's important to me because it's also something that I'm taught as a Muslim and it's important to advocate for other people's rights as well so I'm not but I'll have to make sure that I looking up for my own kind I also have to make sure I look for the people right here at home so that's why politics is important to me

I: Talking about Justice, in what way has your mosque Islamic Center responded to calls of social justice for the Black Lives Matter movement

R: That's a good question so [pause] what the mosque has done is they've done is series of events where they talked about my black lives matter what what means to support black lives how we can support the black Muslims in our community and not even just went black Muslims, black people in general and they've started and they've done their own protests, they led many protests which I've actually participated in like I remember distinctly there's one protest that they organized near Southridge Mall and we walked from Southridge Mall all the way down the street I believe it was like 5 miles long I don't remember but we all came out wearing our mask socially distancing of course but at the same time we wanted to show support for the movement and especially during the time where individuals like George Floyd was unfortunately encountered a great Injustice like he did so umm despite COVID our mosque definitely try their best to organize events like that where we were being cognizant of COVID-19, but at the same time I'm not letting that dictate our ability to stand up for the umm the many black people that have suffered for the past three hundred years so ,those are some of the discussions like virtual events talking about the issue also addressing racism in our communities because unfortunately that is an issue that's not something to let you know aaa I have a blind eye to I'm not going to be biased

about that so that's something and protesting and Instagram lives, again a lot of these things are virtual but then we also had the in-person like the protest

I: When you go through these tough moments like COVID-19 and everything going around in the country like the Black Lives Matter movement, it affects the person mentally. Do you think there is support present to you in your family or community in these times?

R: Umm To be honest no ,we don't really have a support system because we don't have family here besides me and my siblings and my mom all of our families are overseas, most of them are in Syria and we don't have any extended family here nor do we have like super close friends that are like have our backs and stuff so to be honest we don't really have a support system I think the closest that we have to support system is most likely the that youth program the youth programs that we are involved in your mosque because that has given me the ability to occupy myself and occupy my mind and really just put effort into something meaningful that can benefit other people during the pandemic as well through extra spiritual services which is something this important obviously especially during the pandemic otherwise I would say that's probably our only support system the closest support system that we have but things like family and friends that we don't have that.

I: Thank you for sharing your experiences. I would now switch to topics about marriage. So, in your culture, how are women viewed, what is their typical role and what is the typical role of men?

R: So in my family we believe we don't have strict stereotypical roles for men and women, however we do believe in the idea of equity between men and women that men and women both have their different qualities and they have their own unique skill sets that's not to say that all women are the same are all men are the same however generally woman tends to have certain capabilities that men don't have and vice versa so when it comes to marriage the men are responsible for protecting and providing for the women and that means providing for her financially and she has the right to share the right over his finances and she has the right for protection from him. Now this isn't equal when it comes to the man for the woman like the man can't take from the woman financially because she doesn't have the responsibility to provide for him that way .Same thing with protection ,as the man in the house he's supposed to protect the woman and provide for her financially but the woman is not supposed to provide for him financially or physically that's not her role like if she wanted to give him money she could but its not an obligation on her another thing is that what we were taught as in marriage the woman is the is the head of the house so she runs the house and she like takes care of the kids obviously like she can switch between the man and-and herself just depending on the kind of family that that there is but generally is the mom is the most responsible for the house and making sure that everything's maintain like the property itself is protected again. Umm again there is no like strict stereotypes at least for us we don't really follow strict are stereotypes like that like if a woman wants to work she can work but she has to make sure that like her and her husband are on the same page on who's taking care of the kids and like if they're switching between each other umm or if one person to take care of the kids in the other person's go to provide and then until the kids grow into older age enough where they don't need to be taken care of to that extent and then the woman can obviously pursue her educational goals and her work goals and all that

nice stuff but yeah I think for us like we-we do acknowledge that there are differences between men and women and that they should honor that those differences between each other ,however it's not to the extent where we practice super extreme stereotypical roles in the marriage.

I: Talking about marriage have you ever considered getting married and if yes, what does marriage mean to you?

R: Yes I-I-I would LOVE to get married one day however I wouldn't want to get married with just anyone I don't want to settle for anything or anyone if I were to get married I want to make sure that I get married to someone that I genuinely love ,someone that I admire, someone who fits my standards and just the character and personality that I want my kids to follow and learn from so to me marriage is a commitment, marriage is seeing the good and bad in someone, marriage is a friendship, its. Sacred bond between two people , marriage is not perfect ,marriage is teamwork, its two people that are willing to work together against the problem not willing to work against each other marriage is also like a spiritual emotional home between two people and that's what I what I knew and I say sacred bond that their bond is so sacred that regardless of what those two individuals are going through they are each other's shelter they are each other's comfort, solace, their sense of protection and-and resource and whatever it is that they need

I: And do you have certain preference has been looking for a husband for example same religion, nationality, social status, income or education

R: Yeah so when it comes to race I don't have a preference for race ,when it comes to religion I definitely have a preference for religion they have to be Muslim but they also have to be a practicing Muslim who has the same level of religiosity as I do aaaand that they-they are willing to grow as a person and all aspects of their life and that they have an appreciation for their religion so they're not like Islamic robot I don't want someone like that was just religious , super duper religious all the time and I want someone who does have a personality they have their own hobbies and interests and such but at the same time though they they wouldn't give up their face for the world that they're committed to their face and that their faith is the center of their own their lives .Additionally socioeconomic status yes I I would like for them to have similar social status to myself just because of it is just it's just easier that way just for relatability and when it comes to education yes I would like that person to have around the same level of education as I do again because I don't think it would be I don't think I would be able to relate to the person if for example I had a master's degree whereas they had an associate's I just don't think that we we can relate and be on equal footing academically or intellectually

I: The next question is about your career choices and do you think your parents have influenced your choice of career or major in college

R: Yes yes (laughs) they have but that's not to say that the choices that I've made were completely influenced by them or that the choices that I made were were a result of them forcing me but I will say that yes unfortunately there are there were times where I did feel influenced by my family and from even the friends of my own family members who share similar similar views for example when it comes to jobs in mental health, psychology when it comes to jobs that are known to not pay as well as for instance the doctor, lawyer, engineer those are the ones that are

more done upon so yes I was influenced and it's not to say I was influenced to the point where I was forced that there were definitely times where my mom would tell me to make sure I choose something in the medical field or something that would ensure that I'm getting a stable job security etcetera that's not to say that my mom is a bad person that the people around me that that kind of influence we are bad people is just because of their generation ,their generation has ,has been constantly living in the survival mode and they still ARE it like forget dreams and passions like that's not what's on their mind their entire life that was what was truly on their mind was being able to get by and survive so whatever kind of advice and views they're trying to pass down to their children it's not coming out of a place of trying to kill their dreams and spirits what is coming out of a place of love and care EVEN though obviously they probably don't realize it because they're just their mindset is so entrenched and the survival mode mindset that they just don't realize that they don't realize that their kids are living in a different generation where they don't HAVE to worry about survival and then I'll HAVE to worry about getting by because they already have all these opportunities and not living in the country of war like their parents did so I think when it comes to stuff like this it is important for parents to understand their children generation and to really sit down reflect and realize that play realize some of the things that they say however I will say even though for me like I have I have had those influential thoughts from some people at the end of the day I chose what I wanted to choose as a career and umm regardless of what the people around me said I-I made the decision on her percent myself came from me

I: Do you work right now and if you do, do your parents encourage you to work or did they discourage you to work?

R: Currently I'm not working right now but last year I did work I I worked for a semester and a half AND my family was fine with me working if it wasn't a problem I think, I think there were times though where my mom would tell me umm would encourage me not to work because she noticed that the work environment I was working in was not very healthy and in fact it was very toxic to my mental health but there were also times where she would tell me not to work because she want me to focus on school and she was right because working as a as a nursing student especially as a freshman or sophomore nursing student it is it is hard to manage a job while trying to ensure that I'm on top of my studies but umm no overall I left my job because of not because my mom forced me to get out of it because of the toxic environment I was in otherwise though she she was very supportive of me working and it shows supportive of whatever decision I made in regards to work

I: You mentioned that you left your job because it was toxic. Would you mind elaborating more up on why it was toxic?

R: Yeah, for sure. It was toxic because I worked and I worked in an environment where I felt very unappreciated I felt discriminated against by my own boss and that I, I was not on the same level as my coworkers and I definitely felt it and it's something that every person of color, every religious minority ,any minority would feel, it's just a feeling that they they can only feel and the only other minority students can share with them as well as someone who was one of the few people of color and religious minorities working there with a bunch of like in a white students it was really hard because customers would often come up and and they would they would choose



to go up to the white person instead of me or when I would do certain tasks and I would mess up I will get more reprimanded for it from my boss curses the white the white co-worker who did the same mistake or if my boss would try to empathize with almond how they're doing and give them the benefit of the doubt saying things like all well maybe they're stressed out maybe they're busy you know just like you know like seeing them as human where as if I was in that same position I would be instantly dehumanized and it was very frustrating and just very traumatizing for me and it really really really deeply affected my mental health umm significantly so that's why I decided to quit because I could not I could not handle just those microaggressions and just the underlined discrimination that I was feeling

I: It is very sad to know that you were being discriminated against at your work. Would now maybe you want to talk about your friends and how did your religion of culture influence your choice of friends?

R: So for me personally ,I don't let religion, I don't let religion dictate my friendships what I mean by that is that I'm not just going to be friends with Muslims because for me the religion isn't necessarily important what's important to me in a in a friendship is the person's character, the personality, the things that we can relate with the things that we can do together , personality and character are like the two the two things that that define my friendships so right now actually my closest friends to me is actually a non-Muslim and we don't share the same culture as well she's Mexican and I'm Arab so obviously like these are two different cultures that we're dealing with and two different religious background AND despite those differences do like we get along really well like she, her character. she has great character or personality matches with mine and when we have a lot of things in common and we have a lot of things that we don't have in common but we appreciate the differences that we have because it helps us to grow together and learn from one another and to coexist so ummm yeah I don't let religion to find my friendships for me it's the personality and the character, the way the person carries themselves but the kind of Interest they have the way they treat other people their goals in life those are the things that define my friendships I will say though that because I surround myself with people at my mosque that I do have more Muslims friends than non-Muslim friends but that's also because the I am most exposed to Muslims on a day-to-day basis to the student organizations at my University because when I did I had a really hard time making friends like people would definitely try to avoid me and again there was that underlying discrimination there was there were those moments like slight microaggressions so it's not that I don't choose to become friends with people it's just that people choose not to become friends with me.

I: You mentioned a student organization, is there any Muslim student organization at your University and are you a part of it?

R: Yes, there is an MSA at my University aaaand I'm not heavily involved in it although I've attended several of their events before.

I: Thank you.

I: We would now move to questions about your parents, so you mentioned that your parents moved from Syria and when they moved here what their jobs were and what are their jobs now.

R: Soo back when we when we moved back to the US when I was in fourth grade my mom was a stay-at-home mom and my dad owned a small family restaurant. Today though my parents are separated so I don't really know what my dad does because he's not involved in my life anymore however my mom is not a stay-at-home mom anymore and she owns a family a small family business at the moment.

I: The next questions are your cultural clothing, so do you have any traditional culture clothing, if yes, how many do you have?

R: I don't have any cultural clothing unfortunately I think I have maybe one like an abaya, but I don't really think that's like directly linked to Syrian culture ummm yeah that's supposed to say I have a cultural clothing: abaya.

I: Did your mother wear culture clothing at home or does she wear them right now or encourage you to wear them?

R: No, we don't wear cultural clothing at all. All of our clothing is basically American we wear a hijab and we and we just try to wear modest clothing but the clothing itself is not cultural at all and with abayas, we only wear abayas when going to the mosque for like a really religious occasions otherwise we rarely wear them.

I: The next questions are about your perceptions and believes towards disability. Do you think people with disabilities can the lives live lives that are fulfilling as people without disabilities and do you think there is any prejudice towards people with disabilities in your community?

R: Answering the first part of the question yes I think they can live fulfilling lives, however it's up to us as people who are not disabled to help them leave those fulfilling lives cuz people with disabilities obviously they are disabled so they don't have the same privileges that we as able people do so it is a moral duty upon us is able people to help them and ensure that they can live fulfilling lives because they certainly have that potential , second part of the question : Is there a stigma or discrimination against disabled people in my community yes there is there definitely is and it was some was some individuals or as certain groups in my community unfortunately however I believe that a lot of a lot of these prejudices and discrimination comes from the older generation or as comparing the older generation and their views to the younger generation there is a difference I've noticed or I observed from one of my mosque that we have in the area in Brookfield specifically that they actually have a chapter for disabled individuals Muslim disabled individuals umm where they meet up a couple times in the month and they take care of people with disabilities and they meet with established a relationship with them and all that kind of stuff and I think it's a wonderful thing to see like a mosque that has its own chapter like that and I really hope that surrounding mosques can take upon this initiative and that we addressed these prejudices that unfortunately are still stagnant and are in the older generation and that the older generation can try to learn from the younger generation as well because again a lot of these prejudices that we often encounter they are coming from the older generation.

I: Why do you think the older generation difficulty talking about these issues openly?

R: I think maybe they some of them have a hard time open the talking about them because they're just not educated enough or because they're just very stuck in their ways that they they either don't want to change or they don't feel like they can change however though I feel like when when they're younger people trying to talk to older people it just feels like it was kind of feels like a slap in the face like why is there younger child teaching me certain views and again that goes back to some of their mindsets because the older generation grows up with that mindset that that you learnt that younger people learn from the older people and it's not the other way around or it can't be the other way around so that's the mindset they have which is hard to dismantle because when you are raised to think that only younger people can learn from the older generation then it's hard to be able to have these conversations with them when they they've been raised with that mindset in the first place.

I: Do you think that in your community the disabled male and the disabled female looked at differently?

R: To be honest I'm not sure just because I didn't have, I don't have full exposure I haven't had like fully the deep exposure to the difference in interaction between a disabled female versus a disabled male so I'm just going to answer that question by saying I'm not sure due to lack of experience.

I: The next question about covid-19 pandemic's impact on your personal well-being. How has COVID affected you personally in terms of your financial, social or mental health?

R: COVID-19 as obvious as it is has affected my my mental health just like how everyone else has been affected by it from their mental health too so mental health I think is a big one because staying at home all day especially living in a small apartment with very little wiggle room is very frustrating aaand it can be can be veryyyy difficult especially as a nursing student now in my in my supposedly hardest semester of my program where I am required to take those upper tier courses and when there's very little wiggle room for me to like actually sit and study in peace or try to meditate or pray or or try to talk to people online and it just makes it all the more difficult so umm I think just staying at home all day and not being able to have some space aaand the cold itself makes it much more worse because it's prevents you from even going outside it really does take a toll on on my mental health . Another thing I feel that has taken a toll is just it's just the worries around financial stability because again like I come from a single-parent household and my mom runs a small business it's not like it's a franchise type of business so there's unpredictability in whether we will get sales one day the next day so that's that was another thing I had to go through it was the mental exhaustion and emotional, emotional burden of just thinking about the unpredictability in our finances and what may happen in the future.

I: During the pandemic have you developed any new hobbies, or do you have you become begin to read or listen to something which you didn't before?

R: Yeah, I did develop some hobbies are in fact covid has helped me to be retouched with the some old hobbies that I used to have so umm for example becoming more in tune with our artistic my artistic side that was definitely something positive that I've experienced from COVID.

Another thing was just the importance of physical health so like making making certain foods and learning to take care of my body learning to like listen to certain like relaxing music and taking care of my mental health and things like imagery I think those things were like the positive things that do it has like encouraged me to do another hobby I would say is watching Netflix shows I mean everyone I think I can relate to this when it comes to binge watching Netflix during the pandemic but I really feel like I end up watching shows I really liked and that I can really relate with when it came to the characters and just the overall just the settings of the series of those shows aaand it just gives me something to look forward to after studying umm especially like as a student and having something to share with my friends so they can virtually we can just talk about the shows and what's going on send memes and I just kind of like our way of socializing again even though it's not the most ideal way to socialize it does get that foundation to help with socializing with others so yeah those were some of those hobbies.

I: Talking about COVID, I want to know more about how COVID has affected your religious practices. How did you continue to participate in them or there were new modes through which you could participate?

R: Yeah obviously I regard this going on I'm still going to be doing my religious obligations like I still have to pray and I still do pray 5 times a day and I I still try to set a time for myself during the day to just sit and reflect and the pray on my own besides the five daily prayers I mean like I really do try my best to sit down and set a time for myself to read the Quran here and there to ponder and its meanings and lectures where I am learning about my religion and one big thing in particular is was that I took this one course through my mosque which was like an organized course on with the historical biography of of the Prophet of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so that was like a big like a big thing that I did and regards to like religious practices but the obligations themselves did not change the fact I feel like this COVID it has propelled me to has propelled me to release it and reflects more on my religion to learn more seek out religious knowledge and a time in my day that I should schedule just to sit and to ponder on on life and and what matters in life as well .

I: Talking about your mosque, has your religious leader or imam ever drawn scripture to help the community members cope with COVID-19?

R: Yes, yes, all the time, all the time. There is a Hadith that we traced back for the Prophet says that when there's a will there's a pandemic when there's a disease and the specific community and you're in that Community stay in that Community however if you are outside of that community that has a disease and stay away from that disease this was basically the 1400 years ago this was the tradition of the Prophet where if there was a pandemic make this is this was the method of avoiding ,avoiding the spread and avoiding the spread of the pathogens so we we trace things back to our religion to inspire each other and tell each other that that these are the traditions that they were supposed to follow so wearing masks, socially distancing this all part of our faith is what I'm saying is yes our religious leaders do derive different different verses from the Quran to help us cope with hardship so verses that talk about howwww with every hardship comes ease or that God will make a way out of everything in the most mysterious of ways or that like no soul

is burdened beyond what it can bear stuff like that definitely all the time there was always some sort of lecture pertaining to scripture like how are religion can help us cope with COVID-19.

I: Lastly, I would ask is there anything else about your history that you would like to tell me something you think is very important for me to know about being Muslim and Arab in America or your family history?

R: Umm I don't think so, I don't think, the only thing really like if there's one thing I want anyone to get out of this is that is that no matter what situation I'm going through no matter what I'm going through my life discrimination or no discrimination privileges or no privileges I'm proud of who I am I'm proud of being Muslim and I'm a hundred percent unapologetic about it and no one can change that and despite everything that's going on around the world like the concentration concentration camps in China or the constant discrimination against Palestinians the apartheid and and Israeli States or what's going on in the Middle East killing how Muslims are being killed for their faith or is it just discrimination here at home where Muslims are constantly discriminated against or even the discrimination against France umm it's never gonna affect me and it's never going to change the way I feel about my religion in fact it's going to only girl me stronger and my love and appreciation for my faith and I think that a lot of Muslims share the same sentiment that they're very proud of who they are and no one can change that about them can change there is a way that you can change that their appreciation they have for their faith and just how central it is in their life . Islam itself the religion it's it's essential it's the code of our life it's our method of living life coping with the pandemic, dealing with stress, navigating to school, through marriage and everything.

I: Lastly do you have any letters old photographs or any kind of documents which you think will help us understand your family history or which you are willing to share with us?

R: I'm not sure. Are you talking about like childhood photos like report cards from Syria stuff like that?

I: Yes.

R: I may have I may have some report cards from Syria and probably they photos when I was younger but I'm not sure like if if you can be like more specific on what you would like to see I can try to look for some stuff?

I: Yeah, a report card would be a good example because we're also looking at awards, diplomas, certificates from other countries?

R: Yeah, I still have my Syrian report cards that I can see pictures of them and send them to you.

I: That will be great.

R: Okay sounds good. Was there anything else?

I: I don't really have anything else, but you provided really valuable information thank you for sharing your time and energy with me.

I: Yeah, no problem!